

Questions for the Record
U.S. House Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Trade
Hearing on Trade and Labor: Creating and Enforcing Rules to Benefit American Workers
March 26, 2019

From Representative Jimmy Panetta to Steve Catanese

Strengthening Trade Adjustment Assistance

1. Mr. Catanese, when American workers' jobs are outsourced due to deals our government has negotiated, our government has a responsibility to help make them whole. Trade Adjustment Assistance, or TAA, seeks to do just that, by funding retraining and income support for displaced workers. Unfortunately, the Administration's budget has drastically cut funding for TAA. As we continue to negotiate deals, shouldn't we be strengthening programs like TAA, instead of cutting them?

As the representatives of over 19,000 social service workers in Pennsylvania, SEIU Local 668 members are at the frontline of helping Pennsylvania communities get back on track after trade- induced job losses and wage stagnation.

We strongly support Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program, the primary federal program intended to provide opportunities to U.S. workers who have lost their jobs or seen hours or wages reduced as a result of trade policies that sent well-paying manufacturing jobs overseas. TAA assistance has helped millions of workers get back on their feet, but it is a relatively small program with tightly restricted eligibility and benefits.ⁱ

Instead of cutting TAA as the Administration has proposed, Congress should increase funding levels for essential public services our communities depend on like healthcare, SNAP and TAA. TAA should also offer more robust income support, job creation, and training. TAA eligibility should extend to all workers who are directly or indirectly adversely impacted by trade policy, including public workers, service workers as well as workers who lose their jobs due to competition from countries that do not have a free trade agreement with the United States.

In addition, we urge Congress to enact a broader agenda to address failed trade policy and make our economy work for everyone, not just those at the top. This includes updating our workplace laws to make it easier to join unions, increasing the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2024 and making sure that corporations and the very wealthy pay their fair share in taxes. By enacting policies like these, we can help make sure working people in Pennsylvania and across our country have a shot at success in today's international economy.

ⁱ https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Broken_Buffer_FINAL.pdf

Social Services

1. Mr. Catanese, you stated in your testimony that social services are too often cut at times when our most vulnerable citizens need them most. You discussed how Unemployment Compensation doesn't help laid-off workers when the government closes local service centers. How does cutting support for social programs like Unemployment Compensation harm laid off workers? What other programs have we allowed to go into decline, and what has been the effect on laid-off workers?

SEIU Local 668 members help Pennsylvania workers and families get back on their feet and navigate the economic restructuring that has become an inevitable part of increasing trade and globalization. When millions of autoworkers, machinists, steelworkers, textile and apparel workers lose their jobs, the effects reverberate across state and local economies, decimating the tax base in the exact communities that have been hit the hardest. A lack of real public investment has exacerbated the fallout from wrong-headed trade deals and left many communities in Pennsylvania and across the country without the basic elements people need to live their lives well. The dream of safe, affordable housing and public transit that gets us to work, school, or a visit to the doctor is out of reach for many. In too many places, working families can't count on clean and affordable drinking water, or even send their children to the schools they deserve.

Here are just a few examples of how cuts to Pennsylvania's programs have harmed working people:

- In 2016 three of Pennsylvania's five Unemployment Compensation Service Centers were closed. This meant that laid off Pennsylvanians turning to their government for help waited up to nine hours in some cases to reach a specialist and check the status of their unemployment applications-- severely limiting the time dislocated workers could devote to their job search.ⁱⁱ
- 2016 cuts to Unemployment Compensation led to layoffs among Employment Security Specialists who travel to worksites where layoffs are imminent to support impacted staff and brief them on their options and available resources. When Employment Specialists themselves were laid off, Pennsylvania's private sector workers facing lay-offs were placed on even more uncertain footing.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Unemployment Compensation cuts also led to layoffs among Call Center Compensation Referees—this is the staff that laid-off workers in Pennsylvania turn to for redress if there is a dispute with their employer over unemployment benefits.^{iv}
- Pennsylvanians with disabilities who need work or face job loss have been hard hit in recent years because of chronic under-funding of Vocational Rehabilitation, the

ⁱⁱ https://www.pennlive.com/politics/2017/10/pressure_is_mounting_for_a_lon.html

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/TR/Transcripts/2017_0101_0002_TSTMNY.pdf

^{iv} https://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/TR/Transcripts/2017_0101_0002_TSTMNY.pdf

program that is intended help people with disabilities get the training and education they need to land a job.^v

- **Cuts to county assistance offices, case management units, and other human service programs have limited the resources available to help laid-off workers and other vulnerable Pennsylvanians access Medicaid, food assistance (SNAP) and other basics they need to get back on their feet.^{vi}**
- **Fundamental job protections for all working people are at risk because under-resourced and under-staffed Labor Departments are unable to recruit and retain the very employees responsible for investigating offences, like wage theft or employment discrimination.^{vii}**

^v <https://www.disabilitycoop.com/2016/09/21/problems-plague-voc-rehab/22777/>

^{vi} <https://papost.org/2019/02/05/pa-budget-would-add-400-million-to-human-services/>

^{vii} <https://www.nelp.org/publication/testimony-wage-theft-u-s-house-subcommittee-labor-health-human-services>